

CRUSHING IT

Brett Warner is helping to make Scottsdale the pickleball capital of the world

The proliferation of pickleball over the last few years has been nothing less than a phenomenon. Already a go-to hub for golf and MLB spring training, Scottsdale is quickly becoming the epicenter of the pickleball community.

At the heart of the movement is Scottsdale resident Brett Warner, a five-time USA Pickleball national champion, who was ranked 45th in the world in 2022 and is the coach of the Scottsdale Scorchers in the professional Arizona Pickleball League. He is also the co-founder of Pure Pickleball (www.purepickleball.com), which will be the national training center and headquarters for USA Pickleball, the sport's governing body. When it is completed near Talking Stick Resort and Casino in the fall of 2024, the 11-acre site will be the largest facility of its kind in Arizona and one of the largest in the world.

Like most everyone who has been bitten by the pickleball bug, when Warner was introduced to the sport three years ago, he was hooked. "In the first year, I went from never picking up a paddle to winning indoor nationals at my skill and age-group level in singles and doubles and playing in my first pro tournament," Warner says. "The learning curve to get to a level of competitiveness is hours and days, not months and years. You can learn the sport and play in games on your first day. What other sport can you have an 8-year-old and an 80-year-old on the same court, and it doesn't matter if they're playing against each other or on the same team?"

While Warner has found tremendous success on the pickleball court as a player, his passion lies in helping build the community, bringing the sport to younger generations, and establishing pickleball as a feeder into other racquet sports. "I find entrepreneurs locally that have wild visions, and I try to help them achieve their goals. As a result, I've been given the opportunity to work with entrepreneurs who are starting some of the most exciting businesses in the entire sport," he says.

Partnering with Pete and Richelle Nassos on the Crush brand of paddles (www.crushpickleball.com) has been part of that immersion into the community and entrepreneurial side. Warner helps with paddle design, networking and strategy. The company creates professional-level paddles at an affordable price, while tapping into the community aspect of the sport.

BY BECKY ANITOCO / PHOTO BY CLAUDIA JOHNSTONE

